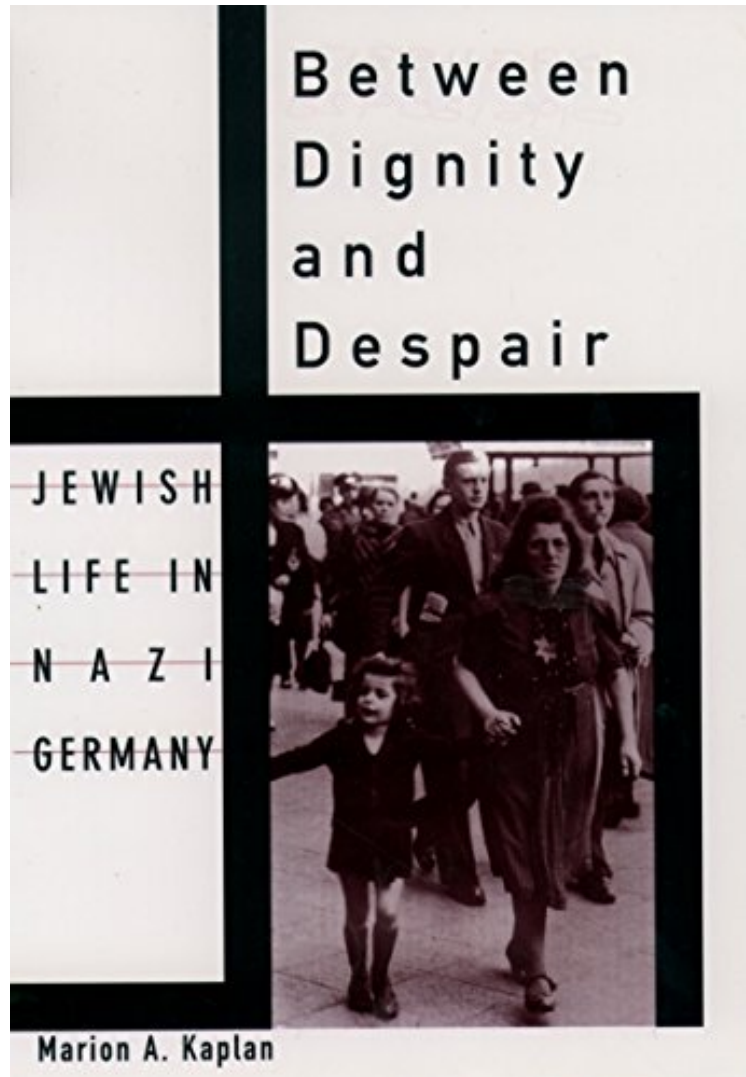


(Mobile library) Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany (Studies in Jewish History)

Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany (Studies in Jewish History)

Von Marion A. Kaplan

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Von Marion A. Kaplan : **Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany (Studies in Jewish History)** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany (Studies in Jewish History):

Kurzbeschreibung *Between Dignity and Despair* draws on the extraordinary memoirs, diaries, interviews, and letters of Jewish women and men to give us the first intimate portrait of Jewish life in Nazi Germany. Kaplan tells the story of Jews in Germany not from the hindsight of the Holocaust, nor by focusing on the persecutors, but from the bewildered and ambiguous perspective of Jews trying to navigate their daily lives in a world that was becoming more and more insane. Answering the charge that Jews should have left earlier, Kaplan shows that far from seeming inevitable, the Holocaust was impossible to foresee precisely because Nazi repression occurred in irregular and unpredictable steps until the massive violence of November 1938. Then the flow of emigration turned into a torrent, only to be stopped by the war. By that time Jews had been evicted from their homes, robbed of their possessions and their livelihoods, shunned by their former friends, persecuted by their neighbors, and driven into forced labor. For those trapped in Germany, mere survival became a nightmare of increasingly desperate options. Many took their own lives to retain at least some dignity in death; others went underground and endured the fears of nightly bombings and the even greater terror of being discovered by the Nazis. Most were murdered. All were pressed to the limit of human endurance and human loneliness. Focusing on the fate of families and particularly women's experience, *Between Dignity and Despair* takes us into the neighborhoods, into the kitchens, shops, and schools, to give us the shape and texture, the very feel of what it was like to be a Jew in Nazi Germany. As the old saying goes, hindsight is always 20-20; people looking back on the Holocaust and the events leading up to it often wonder why the Jews didn't flee Nazi Germany or why they put up with the prejudice and degradation inflicted upon them by the Nazis. From our perspective, 50 years later, it seems almost incredible that the victims of genocide didn't see it coming and made little effort to escape. But as Marion Kaplan makes clear in her powerful book, *Between Dignity and Despair*, the choices were much murkier at the time. The Jews didn't leave because Germany was their home and had been for centuries; like everyone else, they had responsibilities and commitments to family, jobs and communities that kept them there. Nor, in the early days of Hitler's regime, could the Jews of Nazi Germany have foreseen the terrible humiliations they would suffer or imagined the horror of the Final Solution. Kaplan's sensitive narrative, supported by a host of letters, memoirs, and interviews, aims to give a balanced account of German Jewry under the Nazi regime. She convincingly shows how it was German society (indoctrinated by Nazi propaganda) that dealt the first crippling moral blow to the Jewish psyche, before any laws dictated their actions. The Jews succumbed to daily humiliations, ranging from little boys being maliciously teased for being circumcised to older Jews being treated like social pariahs by one-time friends who fell easily into the mindset of racial enmity. Hatred breeds hatred; slowly the German populace strangled the pride of the Jews, creating resentment, distrust and disharmony. Kaplan conveys a poignant, yet subtle message: the fundamental de-facto abandonment of decency and moral civility by the gentile Germans was the catalyst which allowed Nazi leadership to proceed with more aggressive policies that ultimately led to the Holocaust. 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